

Thomas, George Henry

Union general George Henry Thomas, b. Southampton County, Va., July 31, 1816, d. Mar. 28, 1870, achieved fame for his victories in the western campaigns during the U.S. Civil War. After graduating (1840) from the U.S. Military Academy, he served in the Mexican War and taught (1851-54) at West Point. Thomas earned the epithet the Rock of Chickamauga after his strong defenses at the Battle of CHICKAMAUGA, in Tennessee, held the Confederates at bay (Sept. 19-20, 1863) until reinforcements arrived permitting the Federals an orderly withdrawal. Promoted to brigadier general and given command of the Army of the Cumberland, he played a key role in the Union victory at Chattanooga (November 1863; see CHATTANOOGA, BATTLES OF). At Nashville (Dec. 15-16, 1864) Thomas halted Confederate forces under Gen. John B. HOOD that threatened to cut the Federals' communications lines. Thomas later commanded military governments in Kentucky and Tennessee and the Division of the Pacific.

Bibliography: Cleaves, Freeman, Rock of Chickamauga (1948; repr. 1986); Palumbo, F. A., Major General George Henry Thomas (1983).